

MOTHERS CAN BE INTERESTING PEOPLE

By Irma Bombeck

My mother taught me how to drive. As I turned into a dead-end street, she said, "Turn!" I kept on going, so she raised her voice and said, "TURN!" I was frozen to the wheel and when we saw the guard rail looming in front of us, she leaned over and shouted in my ear, "**T-U-R-N!!**"

I slammed on the brakes and said, "There you go again. Always yelling at me."

My mother is a shouter. With her yelling and my snapping my fingers and humming, with a drum and guitar, we could record.

One day Mom shouted under the bathroom door for 45 minutes, delivering a lecture on why a wet towel should not be left on the bed. It included a dissertation on a mother's place in the social system, how the IRS exemption for children is comedy at its best, how gross it is to cut your toenails in the living room, and the sin of leaving 5 empty ice cream cartons in the freezer.

Some days she resorts to notes – like the one she tacked up in the utility room: All clothes left here over 90 days will be towed away at the owner's expense and sold at public auction.

"What does that mean?" I asked her.

"It means you have diapers at the bottom of your stack of clothes and you are 15 years old. It means I am sick of watching you dress each morning over the toaster. It means your clothes have a home and I want to see them there!"

"I've been meaning to talk with you about that," I said. "Why did you throw my blue jeans in the wash?"

"Because they were in the middle of the floor."

"Were they scrunched down in two little holes?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"When they're scrunched down like that, they aren't dirty."

"So how am I supposed to know when they **are** dirty?"

"The dirty ones are kicked under the bed."

"Why don't you put them on top of the bed?"

"Because I don't want to get them mixed up with the clean clothes."

"Instead of sleeping with your clean clothes, why don't you put them in a drawer?"

"Because that's where I keep the dirty underwear I am going to wear again."

“Why would you wear underwear two days in a row?”

“Because it is lucky underwear.”

“For whom?”

“I suppose you want me to put my clothes in the clothes hamper?”

“It crossed my mind.”

“With all the wet towels in there? My clothes would get ruined.”

My mother is also totally unreasonable about other things as well. One night she made my brother wear galoshes to a basketball game. Maybe you read about it in the *New York Times* ... The way he tells it, he entered the gym and a hush fell over the crowd. The players stopped playing and stared.

From out of nowhere a baby-blue spotlight appeared and played around his galoshes as he stumbled miserably to his seat.

The cheerleaders shouted, “He is darling, he is cute; he is wearing baby boots,” then fell down laughing.

The band played, “Be kind to your web-footed friend.”

He summed it up by saying firmly, “I can never go back to school again. I’ll just sit in my room and educate myself with *Sports Illustrated*.”

“This is ridiculous,” Mom said. “You can’t tell me you are the only boy in this country who owns a pair of galoshes.”

“I didn’t say that,” my brother charged. “I said I am the only guy who has to wear them.”

“What do the other mothers do with boots? Make planters out of them? I think you’re dramatizing this whole bit. Someone get the door.”

A few minutes later I appeared. “It was some boy. He returned this pair of gloves he found in the gym. Said they were dropped by the kid who wore galoshes to the game tonight/”

Mom shouted after him. But it was too late. He was already sealing himself in his bedroom. Mom came into my room one day while I was working on a paper on pollution.

“Where do you keep your bed?” she asked, bustling around.

“In the middle of the floor. It isn’t made because I’m airing it.”

“You’ve been airing it for 3 years. Why have you been sleeping with 48 copies of *Teen*, a Dixie Cup, a hubcap, and 18 mis-mated socks?”

“Ecology is a personal thing. It has to start with one person at a time. Every candy wrapper is important. Every bottle cap...”

“Why are my eyes watering?” Mom gasped.

“It’s the aquarium. The catfish just isn’t doing his job. Carelessness. I think that’s what it is all about. If you could just make people aware of how they are cluttering up our countryside...”

“Are you saving these pop cans for anything?” Mom asked.

“There’s a garter snake in one of them. Now where was I? Oh, yes, clutter ... How about, ‘We must all band together and form groups to bring pressure against the earth-molesters.’ How’s that?”

“Wonderful. Did you know you have gym shoes under your bed that have rusted; a 3-year supply of crumpled Kleenex in your sock drawer? A piece of green bread under your pillow? A preschooler under the clothes on your chair? A nest in your toothbrush and a towel on the floor of your closet that just spoke to me?”

As Mom stood at the door and watched a garter snake slithered over a mound of dirty clothes. She mused, “I wonder what you’d get if you recycled kids!”